

Remarks

Contrasting the teaching of the prior art (concerning reticle-history tracking), the claimed invention is directed to a method of mask-life forecasting. Pending claims 14 and 15 and new claims 16-24 specifically characterize these aspects. Support for these additional claims may be found in the instant Specification, for example, at page 7, line 14, *et seq.* and in corresponding Fig. 3. Each of the pending claims is believed to be patentable over the cited art for the reasons discussed below.

Per the Decision of September 16, 2005, and a new ground of rejection based on the '222 publication, claims 1-6 and 9-14 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) over Wiesler *et al.* (U.S. Publication No. US2001/0047222) and claims 8 and 15 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Wiesler *et al.* in view of Terao (U.S. Patent No. 5,191,535).

Applicant respectfully traverses the prior art rejections (Sections 102(e) and 103(a)) because the Office Action fails to present a reference or combination of references that corresponds to the claimed invention, and neither the Office Action nor the Decision addresses this claimed aspect covering mask-life forecasting. More specifically, the Office Action fails to identify where the '222 reference teaches a comparison of the mask data to a mask baseline specification and analyzing and tracking mask degradation data to determine the useful life of each mask. The Office Action relies upon paragraph 20 (and portions of Fig. 3) of the '222 reference which merely teaches that reticle data is tracked. The '222 reference appears to be directed to a reticle history chart in contrast to the claimed forecasting method. The '222 reference does not appear to discuss any analysis involving the claimed comparison or any analysis directed to determining the useful life of a mask, as claimed. Without a presentation of correspondence to each of the claimed limitations, the prior art rejections are improper and cannot be maintained. Applicant accordingly requests that the rejections be withdrawn.

In view of the above discussion, Applicant believes that each of the rejections has been overcome and the application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration of this application is requested.

Should there be any remaining issues that could be readily addressed over the telephone, the Examiner is encouraged to contact the undersigned at (651) 686-6633.

Respectfully submitted,

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